

CAREER PREFERENCE AMONG UNIVERSITIES' FACULTY: LITERATURE REVIEW

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SUMMARY

Why do people enter academic life? What are their expectations? How can they maximize their experience and achievements, both short- and long-term? How much should they move towards commercialization? What can they do to improve their career? How much autonomy can they reasonably expect? What are the key issues for academics and aspiring academics to consider? Basically, academics devote their time to perform three tasks: teaching, research, and community service, where teaching and research are the main tasks. Albeit administration in higher institution considers teaching effectiveness as the main job, they evaluate the academics tenure promotion based on their research productivity. The nature of the teaching-research relation is an eternal dilemma that faces the higher institution structure, and controls its future as well. This dilemma is likely to disturb the faculty, in particular juniors, in their professorship promotion journey. It is important, therefore, to match the academics interests and capabilities with those of the department and institution to which they are belonging to. It is the responsibility of academic institution to create policies that ensure integration of both teaching and research. This would stabilize the faculty academic career that will be positively reflected on their contribution toward both teaching effectiveness and research productivity.

INTRODUCTION

Why do people enter academic life? Is it freedom to pursue a subject that fascinates them? Is it the intellectual challenge? Is it the thought that it a career, with clear focus, that will last a lifetime? Is it the perceived autonomy? Whatever the reason, the importance of blending one's interests and capabilities with those of the department and institution quickly becomes apparent, as does the need for effective communication with colleagues within and outside the department. Unlike a position in industry, an academic appointment can often run for a lifetime. It is important, therefore, to match one's interests and capabilities with those of the department and institution to which one belongs or is considering.

Institutions of higher education that safeguard academic freedom face challenge to serve three main purposes, including educating officeholders for professions, research to unravel and explore novel hypothesis, and serve as communities of learners.^{1,2} These reasons attracted both females and males to an academic career to practice intellectual challenge, freedom to pursue interests, intellectual freedom, and autonomy. Teaching has always been central to the expectations of academics at higher institutions; however, academics see themselves basically as researchers.³ Thus, a faculty to be a good teacher requires translation of the ongoing research in the research to the contemporary information being taught to students. Moreover, research is essential to teaching because what one's teaches is the subject that makes the past speaks to now with a positive voice.^{4,5} This would explain why faculty can not be a good teacher if they are not good scholars.

College professors organize and conduct the functions of higher education. They engage in a variety of activities, from running laboratory experiments and supervising graduate student research to conducting large undergraduate lectures and writing textbooks. With the exception of scheduled classes which can consume as few as three hours a week in graduate universities or up to twelve to sixteen hours per week for undergraduates-a professor's time is largely spent on research, preparing class material, meeting with students, or however else he/she chooses. This profession is thus best suited for motivated self-starters, and its highest rewards are given to those who can identify and explore original problems in their fields. Tenured professors have relatively high job security and professional freedom. Once tenured, a professor can largely set his or her own responsibilities and decide to a large extent how to divide his time between teaching, writing, researching, and administration. However, tenure no longer means complete immunity; post-tenure review is now mandate at most universities, and those who fall behind on teaching and independent scholarship may not be as secure nowadays. The most difficult years of being a professor are the early ones, when there is great pressure to publish a significant body of work to establish the credentials that lead to tenure. However, the work of junior and senior faculty is quite similar, and the profession offers intellectual stimulation and freedom to all its members. Some medical schools are genuinely beginning to address the oversupply of PhDs with a great variability throughout the world. Many Colleges are currently working on this quite hard. So we chose to discuss the promotion criteria of academics in a bit more than one part of the world and at the same time not necessarily reflect the image of the whole globe.

TEACHING-RESEARCH DILEMMA

Research versus teaching is the undergraduate instructor's eternal dilemma such that juggling these two activities is a delicate balancing act for most college faculty.⁴⁻⁹ Theoretically, there should be integration between doing original research and transferring the knowledge gained to others, typically students, through teaching processes.⁸ Practically, however, this concept is still so far controversial in academia.⁸ Quality academic research requires the writing of proposals for funding, supervising graduate students, planning and carrying

out the research, attending and presenting at conferences, and writing papers. Quality academic teaching requires planning and updating lessons, curriculum development, creating appropriate challenging but fair assignments, writing and marking examinations, and dealing with student's personal and academic problems.

For a university to be recognized as "world class" by virtue of the quality of its teaching, academics at these institution need to be successfully expanding the frontiers of human knowledge (e.g., Nobel Prize winners) through performing a cutting-edge research.⁵ Given that federal government counts on universities to be leaders in innovation in different fields of research area,¹⁰ and that scholarly community calls on faculty to stay committed to knowledge for its own interest,⁸ the major challenge is how academic faculty balance between teaching and research.¹¹ In addition, tenure and promotions are usually based on research and ability to publish rather than teaching¹¹. The success in one profession, teaching or research, should not bypass or neglect the other profession.^{8,12,13} In the perfect world, both professions should mutually contribute to the progress of each other in order to support faculty to perform the dual function of infusing knowledge into the juniors who would apply it in their professions.^{12,14}

Any employing institution will invest a great deal of time and resources in its teaching and research, and is obviously intent on finding good matches for the positions it advertises. After initial hiring, over the next several years the institution typically invests further money and resources into these positions until these individuals are able to attract their own independent research funding. Academics who move institutions midway through their careers must negotiate, before accepting the post, preferential terms for their agreed level of internal financial support for research and staffing since there is typically no opportunity to do so once they have started in their new post. Generally speaking, faculty members can be classified into four groups: 1) those who are excellent at both research and teaching (rare); 2) dedicated researchers (no real interest in teaching merely meeting their teaching commitments); 3) dedicated teachers (little interest in research, some are active in educational scholarship, writing texts and instructional software, developing new instructional methods, attending education-related conferences and publishing in educational journals); and 4) the compromising majority (most faculty members value and enjoy both research and teaching, but time or internal department constraints force them to put their emphasis on one or the other).

Given that teaching is considered as the main job of academic, it is critical that when a faculty is interviewing for an academic position, applicants typically should not hesitate to discuss how they would approach their teaching. Departments may request applicants to submit a statement of their teaching philosophy, which thus demands prior preparation in order to articulate one's teaching philosophy, as how one conceptualizes the learning process and how one then proposes to facilitate this process in the classroom.

That said, nevertheless, the majority of universities in the world evaluate their faculties on the basis of their research performance, this disadvantages the natural teachers. Given the relatively low ranking of teaching both in departmental incentive and reward structures at most universities, most academics feel constrained to focus more on research, even if it does not represent their natural strength. This means the result is often a variable level of inadequate teaching, much of it delivered by academics who could actually do much better, and would like to, if they had the time to devote improve their teaching skills. It is vanishingly rare that an academic might be turned down for a position because they have done less teaching. Conversely, less research would get them turned down every time.

THE DECISION TO PURSUE AN ACADEMIC CAREER

Earning a PhD is no small matter. The PhD is the highest academic degree granted by North American universities. It requires exceptional capability and a major commitment of time and resources. Whilst it opens doors to certain occupations, it also closes the doors to others by making one appear unsuited or overqualified. Ph.D. programs are designed to prepare students to become scholars, that is, to discover, integrate, and apply knowledge, as well as to communicate and disseminate it. A doctoral program is an apprenticeship that consists of lecture or laboratory courses, seminars, examinations, discussions, independent study, research, and, in many instances, teaching. One or two years of study normally represent a probationary period during which a preliminary or qualifying examination might be required. The probationary period is followed by an examination for admission to full candidacy, when students devote essentially full-time to completing dissertation research. This research, planned with the major advisor and the dissertation committee, usually takes 1-3 years, depending on the field. An oral defense of the research and dissertation before a graduate committee constitutes the final examination.

There are certainly many other things one can do with a Ph.D. besides becoming an academic (and later, hopefully an associate, then a professor), some of these options will be explored in the sections below (but these other options do NOT appear in the later text). With very few exceptions, one can no longer become a professor in a four-year college or university without a Ph.D., or its equivalent. In all science fields, and also in some engineering fields, once awarded a PhD there is often then a prior requirement of a period of 2-4 years in a postdoctoral post before being able to seek an academic position.

The path to becoming a tenured college professor is arduous. While a master's degree may be sufficient to qualify to teach in a two-year college, a doctoral degree is required to teach in four year colleges and universities. In addition, post-doctoral experience is an added advantage. For the coveted tenure-track positions, virtually every successful job candidate now boasts at least one and usually two "post-doc" years, and these are necessary to remain competitive, which means gathering a sufficient backlog of publications and writings in progress. Personal relationships with faculty are also critical in this

hunt for a first job, as teaching positions in many areas (particularly the humanities) can be scarce. In the United States, while approximately 80 percent of college jobs are in four-year institutions, about a third of all college faculty are employed part-time or in non-tenure track positions, and this percentage has risen in recent years as colleges attempt to control costs.

Once an academic position has been secured then, often some years on, the next critical step typically surrounds issues of tenure. Obviously, tenure is important and often dominates the thoughts and actions of junior academic staff. For most, this translates to a strict prioritization towards research. Having, or negotiating for, a faculty mentor is an important step in helping traverse through the tenure maze. Mentors may be internal (best) or external to the department, or possibly from even outside the university. The essential is that they will be proactive on important issues whenever necessary.

Many academics find that, as their research interests mature and a list of resultant publications have accrued more time and their own imaginative resources for pragmatism and originality becomes increasingly devoted in pursuing research grants. Forming appropriate collaborative research relationships both within one's institution, and externally, often make a huge long-term difference in research and academic performance. With seniority should come the credibility to write reviews and textbooks. With seniority presentations at national conferences should eventually become presentations at international conferences and later, become invited plenary presentations. Effective networking within local institutional and international academic peers is vital. Interestingly, many academics find that their individual academic accomplishments are honored more by others than by those at their own institution.

PRODUCTIVITY OF FACULTY RESEARCH: AN ETERNAL CHALLENGE

Even though teaching is the main job for their academics, they see themselves as research scholars¹⁵. Junior faculty need to provide early evidence of their teaching competence and scholarly abilities, both being prerequisites of promotion and tenure. Thus, academics should exert extraordinary efforts at different time points in their careers to achieve the goals of their research interest¹⁶. However, the challenge is how to manage their time that is dedicated basically for teaching¹⁷. The main thing that the junior faculty can do is to keep an eye on the tenure. It sounds cold to suggest that the struggle for tenure must supersede human interaction, and many find it difficult to so strictly prioritize that research takes precedence over everything. The second thing junior faculty must do is to identify a faculty mentor to help them through the tenure maze. Mentors come in all sizes, shapes, races, and departments. Often a mentor will be outside one's department, even outside the university. He or she may play the role of ear, or sounding board-someone to help navigate the subtly nuanced language of academe. The third thing junior faculty should do it network (i.e., attending academic conferences and meetings which reinforce the notion that you are not alone). Effective mentorship is crucial to career development. Strategies to

improve the availability of mentors include mentoring multiple mentees at once, compensating mentors, co-mentoring, and long-distance mentoring.

BUILDING SUCCESSFUL TENURE

It is also recommended that juniors would stay away from writing textbooks early on, overtime; however, they will be capable of making different contributions to the academic enterprise. They need to create intradepartmental and interdepartmental research collaboration that might compensate the limitation in their time that is dedicated for research¹⁸. They can also look for outsider junior or senior academics who have established research career¹⁹. Such collaboration could be at any levels that can lead to publications in peer-reviewed journals. Neither the order of authorship nor the magnitude of contribution is an issue, but the motivation behind the collaboration is the issue¹⁸.

Of necessity, academics find they must focus on different goals at different points in their careers. Over time increasingly seniority brings additional institutional responsibilities, staff careers to foster, administrative appointments, and faculty governance. At the outset there is a personal need, and typically some external pressure, to provide early evidence of teaching competence, scholarly abilities, and to show an interest in research since these attributes may be benchmarks or prerequisites for later promotion and tenure. For many, teaching and research is an extension of the same activity, namely curiosity and creativity. It seems as if both teaching and research are expressions of intellectual curiosity. Therefore, academics, in particular juniors, should negotiate with administration to match their teaching courses to their research interests. This would facilitate their teaching efforts, shorten the time for courses preparation, create time that could be dedicated to research, and overall enhance integration between teaching and research for the sake of improving student intellectual learning. Teaching and research require different skills although both are driven by curiosity but success in teaching does not necessarily relate to the success in research experience. Teaching is mostly based on a BSc and MSc (i.e., courses lessons) while PhD is a research degree which candidate learns research skills not teaching skills.

CONCLUSIONS

Teaching and research are the two main factors in the success of any faculty or institute. Research is mandatory to the understanding, development and advancement of science, while teaching and training are not only the corner stone of building and establishing generations of educated, and therefore effective, members of society. Therefore, both teaching and research should, whenever possible, be seamlessly integrated into departmental activities by experienced staff. The reality is however that those at assistant and associate professor level, in addition to their teaching commitments; typically heavily prioritize establishing and advancing their career mainly in favor of enhancing their research activities. In contrast, full professors, trained in an earlier era under different criteria and pressures, and who have already established their careers, typically have simultaneously developed well their teaching skills as well as

produced an excellent record of research in their chosen subject. Thus, there is currently a ghost in the teaching machine at assistant and associate professor level which shows no sign of abating. Should this be a reason not to go into academia? No, it is just something important to be acutely aware of.

Given the relatively low ranking of teaching in the incentive and reward structure at most universities, there is little choice about which activity to compromise on. Students, therefore, get a lot of inadequate teaching, much of it by people who could do much better and would like to, but who feel that they just can't afford the time. Continuing one's research is particularly important in the sciences, where it is often impractical to shut down a research lab. But even outside the science cutting back on research is often impractical, may be research should not be the coin of the realm. Nevertheless, balancing the competing demands of research and teaching, in an increasingly competitive environment, remains fundamental to a successful academic career. Solving teaching-research relation dilemma would improve both teaching effectiveness and research productivity in higher education through recruitment of academics with research- and/or teaching-related qualification.

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